

POWER GAME II

Commissioned as a one-off build after production had stopped, this Super Moonraker 36 is the very last of a special breed. Now in the ownership of Alan Waller, she has been kept in immaculate condition, as Jake Kavanagh reports.



Many connoisseurs consider the Moonraker 36 the best mid-sized fast cruiser of the 1970s. It offered a flybridge layout, six berths in three cabins and respectable cruising speeds with twin shaft drive diesels, and it arrived on the scene at an initial price of less than £10,000.

Nearly 400 examples were produced, firstly by Moonraker Marine of Brundall in Norfolk, later by JCL, until they went into liquidation in 1980, and finally by DC Marine, who gave the model a revamp and a very brief resurrection some years later as the Super 36.

We used to think the story ended there, but we were not quite right. Although the last boat of DC's limited production run was built in 1988, a very special one-off was commissioned in 1991 by Vic Bell, the owner of Aqua Bell, the company which used to mould Moonraker hulls.

Originally named Excel, she was for Vic's personal use, and no expense was spared in her fit-out and specification. So she was not only the last of the Moonrakers but also probably the best.

We were alerted to her existence by her current owner Alan Waller, who renamed her Power Game II. He invited us to Southsea Marina in Hampshire to see the boat for ourselves. "She's a beauty," he told us, and we were not to be disappointed. Had the marque survived, the build quality evident in this craft would surely enable it to compete on today's market.

Alan seems to have an eye for a bargain. His previous boat was a Fairline Fury MkII, which he bought new just before the introduction of VAT. "I paid £5400, instead of the £5940 it would have cost after the budget," he grins. "When I sold her 10 years later, I received £5000 more than I paid for her, and £400 more than I wanted. I was lucky enough to have three would-be buyers vying with each other."

After a period of boatlessness, his investment in a craft to enjoy during his retirement would be more substantial.

He had decided it should be Moonraker. "I like their fairly low freeboard, which helps you climb on and off

without too much effort. They are also spacious and airy inside, with big windows, not the tiny little ports you get on some boats." But he had not banked on finding Bell's custom-built special, which happened to be on the market, and with which he fell in love immediately.

For a boat that had a reputation for being affordable, even 'cheap', this particular example was quite expensive at around £85,000. But there were good reasons for that. For one thing, she was in mint condition, having logged just 97 engine hours in one year's use

Besides, she had been fitted with more potent engines than most Moonrakers, twin six-cylinder Mercruiser D4 2L diesels producing 220hp apiece for a top speed of around 25 knots. These were state-of-the-art when installed, using the then much-touted technology of indirect injection which allowed them to claim to be 'smokeless'.

And then there was the fit-out "She also has every conceivable extra," Alan enthuses "Apart from an array of electronics, there is also Webasto warm-air heating, electric toilets, two showers and a 1000W electric windlass. Her interior is teak-faced Bruynzeel plywood, with solid teak fiddle rails, door frames and edgings. There are no sharp corners anywhere in the living area. Everything is faired off."

The boat even came complete with a full set of matching cutlery and crockery, all of which had been specially commissioned to fit in her cupboards.

Alan went ahead with a survey, which threw up a surprising number of faults, most of them cosmetic but still needing correction. The radar arch rattled, for instance, until a stainless steel brace solved the problem. Aqua Bell undertook to do the work before the transfer of ownership went ahead in February 1993.

However, there was one fault which was actually introduced by the surveyor, and which subsequently almost led to disaster for Alan and his family.

The fuel breather hose had some liquid in it, where it dropped into a loop close to the fuel tank connection. Assuming this was causing a blockage, the surveyor told the boatyard to get rid of the loop.

In fact this 'swan neck' had been designed as a safety measure, but was simply the wrong way round: it should have looped upwards. The idea was that if any seawater should find its way into the breather via the hull vent in rough conditions, it would be prevented from getting into the tank.

During a passage from the UK to Jersey with the redesigned, loopless breather in place, a problem surfaced.

"We were off the Corbiere light when the port engine failed. The starboard one was running very poorly too, and I was obliged to call St Helier port control and tell them we had a major engine problem. Thankfully, we made it to safety under our own power, but the repairs, including a new injector pump and one injector, were very expensive.

"Consulting an engineer produced a diagnosis that salt water had entered the fuel tank. but I was convinced this was because we had picked up contaminated fuel at our last refill. So, after 28 days laid-up in Jersey for repairs, we continued our cruise.

"After just an hour at sea, we found water building up in the fuel separators, which we kept draining off. Eventually we found that if we disconnected the breather hose this seemed to cure the problem."

Alan successfully sued the surveyor for negligence, and recovered the cost of the repairs, plus compensation for lost holiday time and other expenses. The total settlement came to £2500, with a further £1800 legal costs.

"It would have been a lot less if the surveyor had admitted liability and settled with me out of court," Alan says. "Despite the possibility that his oversight risked our lives and could have wrecked our boat, I originally asked only for the cost of the repairs."

Power Game now has a substantial upward-looping swan neck in the breather hose, and a clamshell vent over the skin-fitting.

The Mercruisers have run faultlessly ever since, covering more than 5000 miles at an average speed of 18 knots. Alan's meticulous records show that they have settled down to an average consumption of 7.64gph between them.

"One secret of low fuel consumption is to keep the bottom clean, with an annual scrub and a good grade of antifouling," he says. "I also make sure I keep right up-to-date with maintenance.

"The engines are serviced by MannAuto of Southampton, an authorised Mercruiser dealer, and every two years I have all 12 injectors serviced by my local Bosch agent, Rayner Engineering. My most recent bill for this job barely ran into double figures." Power Game's superstructure, with its angular corners, is strangely attractive although obviously dated. Curiously, her flybridge is 4in (10cm) lower than on standard boats, and this means the single door from the cockpit into the accommodation is quite low. Climbing down inside

involves an awkward half-twist and stoop, and it is difficult to imagine any modification which could make this easier.

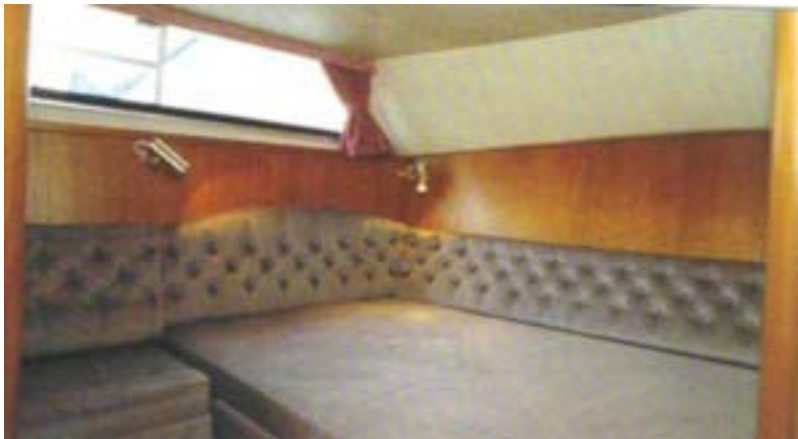
Inside, there is plenty of headroom. Four berths can be made up in what is a very open-plan forward area, two under the foredeck and two in the dinette area opposite the interior helm, and comparative privacy afforded by an aft master cabin with an en-suite toilet/shower compartment. In between are a nicely finished



Power Game II's accommodation is plush, with comfortable upholstery, plenty of teak-faced Bruynzeel plywood and solid teak fiddles.

galley to starboard and a daytime WC to port. The comfortable modern upholstery and headlining, and the hand-made curtains, were all done by Jeckells of Wroxham. As we potted down the short winding channel out of Southsea Marina, we could see why Mercruiser were so proud of their smokeless technology. After a small amount of light grey fog when the engines were started from cold, there was very little in the way of diesel fumes from the exhausts once they were warmed up. Alan says he barely has to clean off any of

black soot seen on many other motorboats' transom and exhausts. The engines, spinning a pair of four-bladed 18in. x 21,5in. nickel/bronze props via 2:1 Hurth gearboxes, also run unobtrusively. It was kicking up a fair old chop at the entrance to Langstone Harbour, but Alan is unfazed by such conditions, having every confidence in Power Game. "I try to cruise in fair weather," he says, "but I know that if I get caught out the boat handles very well." Pushing out into open waters, we were soon experiencing for ourselves the Moon-



A strength of the Moonraker's six-berth accommodation is the privacy afforded by the aft cabin

raker's ability at sea. Its deep-vee hull, which begins to shallow out only halfway down the keel, gives a soft ride, and you slice through the waves without slamming, a trait that earned this model the nickname 'softrider'. Bennet trim-tabs are fitted, with controls at both helm positions, but Alan admits he hardly touches them.

We pushed Power Game up to 24 knots at one point, although Alan usually cruises at 16 knots. Trying the boat at all points of the compass, we found she handled each one well, admittedly rolling fitfully in beam-seas until the power went on again. Moonrakers have something of a reputation for being dif-

ficult to steer downwind, but Alan tells us he has never experienced a problem with this.

It was too rough for us up top, so we huddled in the wheelhouse and enjoyed the view through the large windscreen and side windows, which give good visibility in all directions except directly astern. For mooring, Alan is always at the upper helm position whatever the weather, especially as his berth at Southsea is only a few inches longer than the boat itself. The wheelhouse is festooned with electronics, including a Cetrek autopilot, a Philips AP Mk5 Decca navigator, a Furuno radar and a Garmin 120 GPS receiver. The fish-finder is particularly lurid, with its eight-colour display. Moving around deck as we came in to moor again was easy, clearly making this an ideal craft for cruising shorthanded.

Alan knows *Power Game* is a thoroughbred boat, and he is very proud of her, but he plans to sell her in about four years time, when he feels she might become a bit of a handful for him. Whoever buys her might get a real bargain, as he is assuming he will write-off 4% per annum in depreciation; not surprisingly, a member of the newly formed Moonraker Owners Club has already asked for first refusal.

Power Game II might be the last of the Moonrakers, but will she always be? With the moulds still in existence, and currently up for sale, we wonder whether there might one day be a revival of this popular and very practical marque.